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Hegel on Christianity in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

There is a difficulty in interpreting Hegel's views on Christianity as they are presented in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). One position is that he is endorsing Christianity and its articles of faith as the representative truth of Absolute Being. In this reading Hegel is a Christian apologist who is attempting to reconcile his philosophy with the traditional Lutheran teachings concerning the Trinity, Creation, and Incarnation.¹ There is a contrasting interpretation, expressed by several prominent commentators, that he is rejecting Christianity and is instead endorsing atheism.² One sign is that he identifies Absolute Being with humanity, and another is that the appearance of the incarnate god is simply the return of the world-historical Lord.³ Others view Hegel's philosophy as pantheism because Absolute Being is seen as a god of natural religion.⁴ According to both of these interpretations Hegel is seen as opposing Christian

¹ Peter Hodgson writes, "Hegel has adopted the classic Lutheran doctrine of the two stages of Christ (humiliation and exaltation)...Hegel moves on to provide a redescription of the central Christian theologoumenon, the Trinity," (Hodgson 2008, 37-8). Martin De Nys believes that Hegel is attempting to show that moral consciousness is the basis, or ground, for religious consciousness and Christian teachings (De Nys 2009, 37 and 48). In both accounts self-transcendence occurs through acceptance of traditional Christian doctrines. Stephen Crites contends, in contrast, that Hegel is not defending any specific Christian confession but is instead framing the philosophical argument by using the pattern of Christian identity: "The pattern is essentially that of the gospel itself...though Hegel's intent always remained remote from any Christian apologetics," (Crites 1998, 195).

² Alexandre Kojève claims, "*Schicksal* [destiny], or the fate of Christianity, is to accept atheism, or Hegelian human-theism. Man is now an atheist," (Kojève 1947, 207). All translations from the French are my own. Robert Solomon continues: "The secret...is that Hegel is an atheist. His 'Christianity' is nothing but nominal," (Solomon 1981, 582).

³ Kojève contends, "Consequently, to overcome the insufficiency of the Christian ideology, to become free from the absolute master and the beyond, to *realize* freedom and to *live* in world as a human being, who is autonomous and free, all of this is possible only on the condition that one accepts...atheism," (Kojève 1947, 183).

⁴ Raymond Williamson after examining the arguments for atheism claims that Hegel is advocating pantheism. (See Williamson 1984, 215-30.) He contends that Charles Taylor correctly identifies Hegel's thought as pantheism, but Taylor only says that "Hegel's position was in a sense on a narrow crest between theism and some form of naturalism or pantheism," (Taylor 1979, 40). Others support Williamson's view; such as, Merold Westphal, "Like Spinoza, Hegel is a pantheist...", (Westphal 2004, 66), and Gerald McCool, "Pantheism had replaced the personal God of historical revelation with its

teachings. Yet another position is offered by Neo-Hegelians of the nineteenth-century; that he is providing a philosophical exposition that is post-Christian but arises from Christian teachings.⁵ According to it, Hegel's philosophy is rooted in Christianity, but he is sublimating it in favor of a new theological metaphysics. Similar to the atheistic accounts, the worldly God is identified with humanity, but the Lord of natural religion is sublated (negated but preserved) in the pure thought of Absolute Being.⁶ In this paper I will argue, in contrast to these interpretations, for an ecumenical position. Hegel is arguing in favor of the Christian representation of Absolute Being, but it is rooted in the plurality of Christian experiences, and this means that the philosophical concept develops in light of orthodoxies and heresies.⁷ From his studies of patristics and church history at the *Tübinger Stift* Hegel understood the complex and dialectical development of the

impersonal Absolute Idea. The greatest proponent of modern pantheism was Hegel...,” (McCool 1989, 92).

⁵ Hermann Hinrichs, a Right Hegelian, proposed that Hegel's philosophy of religion considers Christianity to belong to a “dead world” and is “already a forgetting of the actual world”; he, thus, initially viewed Hegel's philosophy of religion to be post-Christian. See Hinrichs's letter to Hegel, December, 1818, No. 353. (Hoffmeister 1953, 2, 206-7.) Later, he amended his assessment to say that Hegel's philosophy of religion was Christian because it is developed through the spirit of Christianity and is thus the product of Christianity. See Hinrichs's letter to Hegel, January 25, 1822. (Hoffmeister 1953, 2, 298-300.) Ludwig Feuerbach, a Left Hegelian, saw Hegel's theology as thematically post-Christian because it had outgrown Christianity. See Feuerbach's letter to Hegel, November 22, 1828. (Hoffmeister 1953, 3, 244-8.) In reference to this Neo-Hegelian position, Hodgson objects to it but offers no reply. (See Hodgson 2008, 32.)

⁶ Karl Rosenkranz, who was editor-in-chief of *Hegel's Werke*, says, “Since this specific individual [as Absolute Being] has shown himself [to be a simple empirical being]... Absolute Being seems to possess only this humble state, and only by being *resurrected* spiritually does it becomes known essentially. One could also say that this is the point where the master shows himself through this limitation. Because of this mediation [through resurrection], which shifts the sensible nature of the representation into the thought of Absolute Being, its empirical appearance belongs presently to the immediate moment of what is *past* and *distant*. Indeed, the discord between this [empirical] representation and the concept...will always return because of this opposition,” (Rosenkranz 1977, 211, my translation).

⁷ Cyril O'Regan considers Hegel's theological account to focus on the immanent Trinity, which is informed by the Gospel of John, the Gnostics, Master Eckhart's Neo-Platonic theology, and Jacob Böhme's theosophy. (See O'Regan 1994, 93-4.)

Christian religion.⁸ His earliest writings--such as, “Wie wenig die objektive Religion...,” or “How Little the Objective Religion,” “Öffentliche Gewalt,” or “Public Authority,” “Unter objectiver Religion,” or “Under Objective Religion” (1793), and “Das Leben Jesu,” or the “Life of Jesus” (1795)--show us that he considered speculative theology and Christian history to be interdependent.

In the phenomenological account Christianity arises from the pagan Greco-Roman culture, even as it sublates it by establishing a unity between God and humanity through the mediator who is the God-man, or “unrestricted reason,” in the person of Jesus.⁹ In his self-certainty the God-man as Servant (*Knecht*) overcomes the false identification of divine with the Lord (*Herr*) of the World. Hegel’s own position is that our grasp of revelation has to be true to the experience of the Christian congregation, and it alone shows us the truth of Absolute Spirit as the unity between God and human universal self-consciousness. This unity is made real in and through the community’s witness of the God-man whose true identity is reflected in the self-understanding of the religious community. The Lord of the World should be seen, however, as an idol of natural and civil religions, and its role in Christian identity has to be overcome in any philosophically reformed theology.

The Trinity

In the final section of chapter seven, “Religion,” section C, “Revealed Religion,” Hegel discusses the Christian conception of the Trinity. He already has in the preceding section,

⁸ See “Aus den Vorlesungsverzeichnissen der Universität Tübingen (II).” The courses, taught by Le Bret, Uhland, and Storr, from 1790-3 all cover early Church history and dogmatic controversies. (See Hoffmeister 1953, 4/1, 37-9.)

⁹ Hegel says in “Das Leben Jesu” that “Entirely free of all barriers unrestricted reason is divinity itself. – The plan of the world is, therefore, entirely ordered by reason,” (Hegel 1989a, 207). This is my translation.

“Religion as Art Work,” described in some detail the pagan trinity, as a progression from the father figure, Zeus, to his natural son, Phoebus Apollo, arriving at the sacred feminine, the Erinyes, who are the guardians of divine law (Hegel 1980, 394). The three separate persons become, however, united in the one eternal substance of the father. Zeus exemplifies the Essential Light (*Lichtwesen*) that provides Absolute Being to Phoebus, the Son of Light, and the Erinyes, the Daughters of Darkness. The pagan trinity is antecedent to the Christian conception, and, as we will see, the identification of the Son of Light with a “natural child” is retained in Hegel’s account. The rise of Christianity, however, sublimates this earlier trinity by transposing the externality and naturalness of the pagan representation into the faith of subjective spirit, or, more specifically, into the dimension of the human subject called “universal self-consciousness.” Only by virtue of this transposition is pagan natural religion overcome in the creation of a new conception of religious identity. “Revealed Religion” focuses on this conception.

In terms of the transposition, Hegel claims that in the development of self-consciousness its universal level becomes God-infused.¹⁰ Its individual level remains separate and mundane. In this respect humanity is divided into two natures, and in this duality individual existence (*Dasein*) belongs to the natural world. *Dasein* is the qualitative character of all natural beings. He never claims that the whole of self-consciousness becomes God, or *vice versa*; only that religious self-consciousness, sharing with others a common life (*Gemeine*), identifies itself with the

¹⁰ In chapter seven, the universal self is at first identified with the dead leader of the polis who belongs to the ethical community and not, as De Nys claims, to morality and judging consciousness. (See De Nys 2009, 41-3.) Hegel makes the point early in chapter seven when he says that “In the ethical world we saw, in contrast [to “Culture” and “Morality”], a religion, namely, the *religion* of the *underworld*. It has faith both in the fearful unfamiliar night of *destiny* and in the Eumenides of the *departed spirit*. —The first kind of faith that belongs to this religion is pure negativity in the form of universality, and the second kind is this negativity in the form of singularity. Absolute Being is, indeed, in the second; therefore it is the *self*, and what is *present* is nothing other than itself,” (Hegel 1980, 363, emphasis in the original). All translations of the *Phenomenology* are my own.

manifestation of God in the world as an individual person: the God-man. Self-consciousness identifies itself with him and accepts through faith that God has become man. We will discuss the Incarnation in a later section, but Hegel's account of the doctrine of the Trinity comes after this point.

The Christian Trinity only emerges as a distinct idea when two events occur: the spirit of the people (*Volkergeist*), which is identified with the early Christian congregation, acknowledges the death of God because it witnessed the demise of the God-man. This community reflects on the manifestation of God in the world and his departure from it as the revelation that leads them to declare the certainty of the philosophical proposition that the "self is Absolute Being" (Hegel 1980, 400). This proposition means that Absolute Spirit has become a human being who has lived, died, and returned to eternal substance. Hegel explains, "The religion of art belongs to ethical spirit... that holds to the proposition: 'the self as such, or the abstract person, is Absolute Being.' In ethical life this self, who was absorbed within the spirit of the people, is the *consummate* universal being. However, a *simple singular being* raises itself from this content, and its conventional meaning purifies it to become a person" (Hegel 1980, 401). In the aftermath of his death and return to eternal substance the people have their faith in this proposition and, thereafter, perform the apostolic mission to teach its truth as necessary to their faith. It is the role of the "teacher of the people" to fulfill this mission.¹¹

From this statement the divine sortie is acknowledged by the community as having its three modes of identity; that is, self-reflecting consciousness acknowledges that eternal substance has proceeded into a triadic progression: "one of *essence*; one of *being-for-self* that constitutes the otherness of eternal being...; one of *being-for-self* that is self-knowledge in the *other*" (Hegel

¹¹ Hegel identifies his vocation as the people's teacher (*Volkerzieher*) in 1793. (See Harris 1972, xvii and 162-70.)

1980, 410). The first mode is the identity of the divine substance itself: its essence is its existence. This claim expresses God as the essential being (*Wesen*) of faith. It does not state, however, that the divine essence is a person, but we could still call it, according to traditional Christian teaching, a hypostasis since together spirit and substance constitute its unity.¹²

In the first two sections of chapter seven, the identity of substance was associated with natural theology, which in the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Greek nature religions acknowledged their chief deity as the Essential Light. It represents a unitary entity from which all natural beings arise. This representation continues, as well, in Christianity that adopted from its pagan predecessors a naturalized way of thinking of God as first motion, ultimate cause, or prime reality, but in natural theology the divine idea has not progressed to the second moment as being-for-self. It has not truly expressed the significance of the proposition that the “self is Absolute Being.” In fact, depicted as pure substance, Absolute Being is not a subject that has being-for-self. It is, instead, a substance set in the Beyond (*Jenseits*). In order for the divine essence to become united to the people’s common life it has to become embodied in their community and in the formation of individual self-consciousness. This is the function of art by which the divine substance takes on human form, and humans act the part of the divine being; for instance, in the Liturgies of the Word and Communion the priest or minister play the divine role. In art God takes on a personality that is shaped by the community’s understanding of natural right and divine law.

¹² Hegel explains this unity: “self-consciousness... maintains and remains the subject of substance in its externalization, but precisely because it is thus externalized, it is at the same time the consciousness of substance; that is, since self-consciousness *brings about* substance as subject...it retains its own proper self. By doing so it has achieved the unification and interpenetration that both natures have brought forth...[namely,] that both have equal value and are *essential* but also are only moments,” (Hegel 1980, 400-1, emphasis is in the original).

Hegel only uses the term “person” in the context of art and ethics; it is how the faithful relate themselves immediately to Absolute Being, and their reflective association of God with natural right (*Naturrecht*) confers a personality on divine substance (see Hegel 1980, 401-2). The divine person refers to the externalization of the eternal substance into an individual human consciousness who has mundane existence (*Dasein*) (Hegel 1980, 403). Accordingly, it is only the second identity of divine substance that is a genuine person.

Only this second moment constitutes a true subject because only it has being-for-self. This is why Hegel says that this identity is “other” to the first. This second manifestation experiences in its worldly existence the same condition of Unhappy Consciousness that all members of the Christian congregation have known within themselves (Hegel 1980, 403-4). This is a theme that Hegel has been developing since chapter four, “Self-Certainty,” and only here in “Revealed Religion,” is it coming to its ultimate manifestation. The second moment reveals a secret that “Religion as Art Work” was not truly able to divulge; namely, God has become a human being who is not an actor playing a liturgical role in the mysteries but the Unhappy Consciousness who the religious congregations know in their self-certainty.¹³ In terms of the pagan unhappiness, which would include the Stoical and Skeptical stages of “Self-Certainty” as well as the devotees of the mystery cults, their level of self-consciousness has not yet reached the full understanding obtained by the Christian community. Hegel comments that “Its self-

¹³ “This concept [of self-consciousness] is the night of its essence that moves against the day, that is, against the qualitative existence of its moments as independent shapes that create *the secret of its birth*. The secret has within it its own revelation; for qualitative existence has its necessity in this concept because the concept is self-knowing spirit; therefore, the moment has consciousness as its essence, represented objectively to itself,” (Hegel 1980, 370, emphasis added). Later, the secret is identified with knowledge of the self that is to be revealed by a religious congregation: “What has been said to belong to reason, that is, what is revealed to the heart, is in fact still a *secret*, for it still lacks the actual certainty of immediate qualitative existence objectively and as enjoyment. The certainty in religion is, however, not merely something thoughtless and immediate but is, at the same time, the pure knowing of the self,” (386).

conscious life is thus only the mystery of the blood and wine, of Ceres and Bacchus, and nothing else concerning the genuine higher gods, whose individuality as the essential moment encloses self-consciousness within itself. Therefore, [Absolute] Spirit as *self-conscious* spirit has not yet offered itself to consciousness, and the mystery of the bread and wine is not yet the mystery of the flesh and blood” (Hegel 1980, 387).

This manifestation of the second moment is also acknowledged by the congregation as the source of their self-conscious unity and identity. The divine person is both the eternal substance extending itself into humanity and the worldly manifestation of the historical God-man who is Jesus. This is the only manifestation of God that Hegel speaks of as having perceived existence, that is, a physical presence witnessed by others. He tells us that we know the truth of this existence because the faithful have seen it: “Absolute Spirit is self-consciousness, that is, *there exists* an actual human being; the believing consciousness *sees and feels and hears* this divinity...[Consciousness] proceeds from the immediate presence of existence and recognizes God in it” (Hegel 1980, 404-5, emphasis is in the original).

The third manifestation, which appears only after the physical death of the God-man, is identified with the spirit of the people in terms of the collective identity of their community. It is proclaimed by their faith and attested to by their witness. In the knowledge of their own identity as having being-for-self, they affirm that they are one with the divine other. This is why Hegel says that the third moment takes its identity from the second’s “being-for-self” which is other to the first. The life of Jesus is thus reflected into the common self-identity; his life becomes their universal self.

Once this relationship is acknowledged, the human community and Absolute Being are united in universal self-consciousness. Thus, the third mode is the unity and identity between the

religious self-consciousness and the Godhead in and through the devotional nature of the folk-spirit. It is not a specific person but a stage of religious identity that belongs to self-consciousness. Once more, we might use the term hypostasis for this union since there is an actual identity relationship between all members of the community and the divine being, but the psychological language of person is not applicable. The third moment, conveyed through the celebration of Pentecost, is not something eternal but comes to exist only by virtue of the common understanding that proclaims in the liturgy that the people have witnessed the life of Jesus and his death. They further claim that their lives are complete through him. The truth that has brought about this union is conveyed by the statement *Gott ist gestorben*, or “God has died” (Hegel 1980, 401). It constitutes a statement of faith, and not, as some commentators have suggested, an endorsement of atheism, because the death of the God-man is the event that transfigures subjective spirit into a formal identity with Absolute Spirit. The statement is only expressing the experience of the Christological event, which can be heard, for instance, in the sixteenth century Lutheran hymn by Christoph Fischer: “*Wir danken dir, Herr Jesus Christ, daß du für uns gestorben bist,*” (Fischer 2001, 3, 45).

We need to make a distinction as this statement applies to “Revealed Religion” as opposed to “Religion as Art Work.” Hegel has already told us that gods die in pagan religions in large measure because they become unmasked in the comedy and satire. He alludes to the portrayals of Dionysius (Bacchus) as drawing the audience away from the religious bonds first presented in the Eleusinian mystery cults (Hegel 1980, 389-9). The aftermath of satire is the loss of faith and the death of the nature gods. “They are clouds, a disappearing mist...,” he tells us (Hegel 1980, 399). The pagan gods are mortal, and we know that they die since the ancient

historians, in particular Pausanias and Plutarch, provide testimonies of their deaths.¹⁴ This symptom of divine mortality does not carry over to “Revealed Religion,” however, because the death of God is the death of the individual’s worldly existence (*Dasein*), an object of perception, and not the essential being that constitutes the identity of the community. The claim that “God has died” means not his ultimate demise but his final identification with universal self-consciousness. God and humanity are conjoined in this revelation through the existence and death of the mediator. This insight transfigures the community, and the human spirit ascends to unity with divine being. This insight is why Hegel, at this juncture, returns to Unhappy Consciousness and recounts its transformation into happiness, because the essence of humanity has undergone an ascent into divinity, and now it has the complete understanding that the “self is Absolute Being.”

The three modes of divinity are permanent and constitute the “unchangeable shape” inherent to Unhappy Consciousness which was featured in chapter four (see Hegel 1980, 122-3).¹⁵ In turn, these modes alter the state-of-mind of self-consciousness by turning it from unhappiness to gladness because by identifying itself with God it has overcome its temporal and worldly uncertainty. In its identity with divine essence the prior incomplete and imperfect self-certainty, bound to natural associations, is replaced by the happiness of divine knowledge within each person’s subjective spirit: “In happy consciousness every feature of divine essence returns; that is, it is the complete *externalization of substance*” (Hegel 1980, 401, emphasis is in the

¹⁴ According to James Frazer: “The grave of Zeus, the great god of Greece, was shown to visitors in Crete as late as the beginning of our era....Beside it [the golden statue of Apollo at Delphi], according to Philochorus, was the grave of Dionysus with this inscription, ‘Here lies Dionysus dead, the son of Semele,’” (Frazer 1922, 265). Frazer cites Plutarch’s “Isis and Osiris,” *Moralia*, vol. 5, and Pausanias’s *Description of Greece* as the ancient sources.

¹⁵ H. S. Harris speaks of the first epoch in terms of Augustine’s experience of Baptism, Sunday devotions of the Mass, and the forgiveness of the Confessional. (Harris 1997, 403 and 410-2.)

original).¹⁶ This is the happiness that, for example, Saint Augustine attests to in his *Confessions* (c. 400),¹⁷ and by virtue of it we recognize that humans have become divine through faith which, for instance, Boethius acclaims in the *Consolation of Philosophy* (524).¹⁸

The irony of such happiness is that it only occurs through accepting the loss of the God-man. Once this loss is acknowledged, the community takes up its kerygmatic mission that acclaims its unity with God, and within this vocation the individuals of the congregation understand that their personal completion is due entirely to their common ethical life. Happiness thus belongs to each person's knowledge of the identity between finite humanity and infinite Absolute Being. The completion occurs only through the mediator who is the incarnate God. But, as we will see, the essence of the Son, or what constitutes his true nature, becomes an open question, and it divides the unity and identity of the community into antithetical confessions. Christianity divides and dissolves its union on this issue.

The three modes of the progression, which traditionally refers to the divine procession of the Trinity, are reflected in consciousness itself, and we could say, if Hegel's account ended here, that his doctrine of the Trinity is similar to Augustine's teaching because the latter also addresses the awareness of the Godhead in terms of how human consciousness reflects within

¹⁶ True religion is necessarily subjective and refers to individuals' beliefs and vocations. In a newly reformed Christian theology, which Hegel advocated, religion must express the universality of subjective experience. (See Harris 1972, 129-31). Objective religion, in contrast, when associated with state authority leads to a corrupt religion. See Hegel, "Wie wenig die objektive Religion," and "Unter objektiver Religion," (Hegel 1989 c-d, 127-30, and 138-40, respectively). (See Harris 1972, 141 and 144-5.)

¹⁷ Saint Augustine says in the *Confessions*, "This is the happy life, to rejoice over you [God], to you, and because of you: this is it, and there is no other....In fact, joy in truth is the happy life. This is joy in you who are the truth. O God, 'my light,' 'the salvation of my countenance, my God.' This happy life all men desire; this life alone is happy; all men desire joy in the truth," (Augustine 1960, 251-2).

¹⁸ Boethius claims, "Since people become happy by securing happiness for themselves, yet true happiness is divinity itself, it is obvious that they become happy by securing divinity for themselves....Therefore, every truly happy person is God. But, to be sure, God is one by nature; however, nothing prevents there being as many gods as you please by participation," (Boethius 2001, 75).

itself three divine moments. As well, Augustine sees in this understanding not any separation between God and the Christian community but a formal identity, the existential consequence of which is our gladness.¹⁹ Hegel presents a case that in terms of identity relationships there are indeed three hypostases.

Hegel's account continues, however, by showing that the particularity of this concept is a deficient determinacy. The formulation is philosophical; it has only a reference back to the existence of the God-man and is not effective in terms of the spiritualization (*Beseelung*) of the community. Consciousness in order to make faith more concrete, that is, more representational of its devotions, amends the speculative proposition by adding to it the natural associations of father and son (Hegel 1980, 410). These representations are the personalities typically identified in the "Lord's Prayer" and "Nicene Creed."

In Hegel's account they show, however, a regression away from the purity and truth of the speculative proposition which, because they are naturalized images, fail to grasp the true essentialities of the concept: "Insofar as the form of this representation [of father to son] and its earlier connection, which are taken from the realm of nature, must as a result become particular, and therefore proceed apart from each other. The moments of the movement, which compose [Absolute] Spirit, are taken to be isolated stunted substances or subjects, instead of being *transcending moments*" (Hegel 1980, 411, emphasis is in the original). He goes on to show that the concept, linked as it is to the ethical life of a congregation, cannot sustain itself within the sphere of the three moments because the ethical life breaks into different expressions of devotion.²⁰ The folk-spirit becomes divided in its common life. Through the regression into

¹⁹ Saint Augustine in the *City of God* says, "We resemble the Trinity in that we exist; we know that we exist, and we are glad of this existence and knowledge," (Augustine 1972, 459).

²⁰ De Nys is correct that speculative image of the Trinity appears in Hegel's account, but he does not acknowledge that it develops through the immanent Trinity established in the ethical life of the Christian

imaginative representation the truth of the philosophical concept is obscured, the unity of the *cultus* is divided, and many ecclesiae arise claiming to be the one and true Catholic Church. Notwithstanding this division and regression the reflective thought of the Christian community, seeking to extend its knowledge of divine being, evolves further and claims that creation itself occurs in and through the divine procession.

When we come to this point where creation is begotten as an emanation, or externalization, of the Godhead, then the Trinity is no longer triune because its extension transcends the quantifiable limit established by the earlier conception. In fact creation, as the simple emanation of divine substance, would in its conceptual purity share Absolute Being: it is also Being, Oneness, Goodness, and Truth. But consciousness recognizes that this is not the case in terms of the singularity and purity of divinity, that is, creation does not reflect in-itself the monarchical simplicity of God. Creation, while partaking in Absolute Being, also has an opposing potency. It is corruptible and becomes bad. The result is also a duality in the representation of God's relationship to the begotten cosmos. The duality weakens and corrupts the inherent divinity of all things. Thus, the emanation of the universe produces an alternation in the faithful's conception of God wherein the divine spirit appears pluralistic. Hegel comments that

Insofar as otherness falls into two, [Absolute] Spirit can in its moments be further determined, and if we were to count it, it would be a quaternity; alternatively, because the plurality itself divides into two, namely, one side that remains good and the other side

community. He appears to be following Joseph Flay's assertions that religion is *objectified* in Hegel's account which makes it external to the ethical life and subjective devotion: "[religion is formed]...in their [the people's] creation of their own substance through their own activities, in their externalization of themselves and submergence of themselves in that substance," (Flay 1984, 234). In contrast, Hegel is saying that the communal identity resides in the common *subjective* experience of knowing that Jesus represents the emanating divine Word as reason, and this knowledge leads to our happiness and exaltation into divinity. Eternal substance has, therefore, externalized itself into one world historical person with whom the faithful identify. See Emil Fackenheim on the "Double Trinity," (Fackenheim 1967,149-54 and 218-9).

falls into evil, the plurality is expressed as a quinternity. —It may be seen, however, that in general it is useless to *count* the moments since, in part, the distinctions themselves are just as much only the *one*, that is, to be more precise the *thought* of the distinction is only one thought. It is *this* thought that is distinguished and a second one is set opposite to it. In part, however, because the many is grasped in the one, the thought of it dissolves away from its universality and must be distinguished into something greater, as three or four distinctions (Hegel 1980, 413, emphasis in the original).

The triune God is sublimated in further distinctions and modes. Hegel is clearly establishing that the philosophical concept of Absolute Spirit expands beyond the doctrine of the Nicene Creed and Saint Augustine's interpretation. It nonetheless still adheres to the Christian tradition. In fact, we can find precedence for his language in Master Eckhart who depicts within the structure of the Trinity not only the identity of God but also of "not God," or the universe (on the connection between Hegel's philosophy and Eckhart's theology see Magee 2001, 23-6). The immanent relationship of creation as the extension of God to not-God becomes the "quaternity" that Hegel speaks of.

The fourth and fifth modes of the divine procession is the clearest expression of Hegelian heresy; for he claims that the persona of good and evil, as they relate to creation, are themselves a further stage in evolution of the divine idea. We cannot discuss here the relationship between good and evil as belonging to God's identity, but it is important to see that Hegel is making a distinction that appears to be in agreement with Christian Gnostics that God is manifest in the world not simply as simple supreme goodness but as good and evil in conflict. This duality reappears in the essence of self-consciousness as a division within human nature. We are bad inasmuch as have natural existence, and we are good inasmuch as we are elevated into divine unity. Our dual nature is also conflicted because of this antithesis between natural good and evil.

If creation is itself the fourth moment, seen as inherently good, it has also within it the explicit corruption away from the supreme good. The fifth term in the procession is natural evil in creation.

Later, Hegel comes back to these points, and there he more clearly identifies the community of the faithful who worship the mediator as the true Son with the good and those who identify themselves with a god of light with the bad. What makes them bad is not their lack of faith but their egoism and vanity, which inverts the universal value of the ethical life, and acclaims worldly honor as constitutive of the supreme good. Hegel has already in chapter five, “Reason,” marked the fault of corruption in the sections involving the “Frenzy of Self-Conceit” and the “Way of the World” (Hegel 1980, 202-14). Chapter six is the history of this disorder set on the political stage of Western Europe that reaches its nadir in the “Absolute Freedom and Terror” section with the death of *l’être suprême* (Hegel 1980, 316-23). Chapter seven, in contrast, constitutes both its forgiveness and the restoration of the flawed worldly self into divine union through the life and death of the mediator.

The eternal truth of God is the simple unity and totality between substance and subject: the hypostatic union. This is why Hegel says, in the passage quoted above, that the three is “only one thought” of God, and the processions of different thoughts are all “opposite” to this one. Recall in his account of God before Christianity emerged that the pagan trinity exhibited itself in a different representative form of unity. The “face” (*persona*) of the concept is shaped through the collective experience of the folk-spirit reflecting its arts, culture, and ethical life, but the essentiality of the concept nonetheless remains pure in its logical form. The oneness (*monarchia*) of the logical form is what constitutes the essential being of God. It is the “one thought” of the divine essence.

Despite Hegel's disclaimer about the number and representative ways that the divine idea is expressed, we can clearly see that he is endorsing philosophically *modalism* as it appeared in the early Christian community. God is one and only can be conceived as one. Hegel's specific view approximates Sabellianism, namely, the Trinity is not composed of distinct persons but *moments* of the single Godhead. (On Sabellian modalism, see Kelly 1977, 119-23; also, Moltmann 1983, 134-7.) What the orthodox call persons are in fact only modes bearing different names for the pluralistic manifestations of the Absolute One. Each name, such as, "Father," "Son," but also "Word" and "Creator," express a distinct representative way that God appears to humankind. These are not empty predicates but determinations, and, while there are indeterminate many modes related to God, the idea of God involves only the one consummate thought of pure divinity. Only the "Son" names the personality of God because only the true Son, Jesus, is reflected in the ethical identity of the congregation, while the natural Son of the Essential Light, called "Phoebus," "Mithras," or "Lucifer," depending on the confession, symbolizes a civic deity that belongs to the estranged objective world. Only the Son as the God-man has formed the self-identity of each person in the Christian community. Each additional name, associated with the imagined identity of God's emanation in creation, indicates a distinct representation belonging to sects who may name themselves "Christian" but who also misrepresent (*verstellt*) the essence of the Son, such as, seen in the Arian and Coptic communities that denied his two natures.

Modalism is a religious position that is closely attached but heretical to the Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinistic communities. It can, however, be used to justify both Eckhart's treatment of the Trinity as more than three eternalities, and also the representations of antithetical attributes emanating from the Godhead that the Christian Gnostics proposed. The modal

procession of God, where each shape is a distinct moment of identity, is an alternative possibility within the Christian tradition. It is expressed in the ethical life within ecclesiastical communities. Hegel's "catholicism" is to capture the fullness of the Christian ethical life as the true religious identity, even if this means that heresies are necessarily part of the common identity of Christianity.

Creation

As we were discussing Hegel's philosophical conception of the Trinity, it was noted that creation proceeds from the second identification of God as being-for-self that has externalized itself; it is the emanation of the divine substance that is expressing itself as the Word (reason) from whence all things come.²¹ Corporeal creation is the fourth term that becomes divided between the good, embodied in the sacred congregation whose self-identity is attributed to Jesus, and the bad, embodied in political dominion (*Herrschaft*) whose self-identity belongs to the god of light, Phoebus or Lucifer.

The doctrine of emanation is part of Christian metaphysics originated in the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus and Porphyry and was offered in the cosmology of John Scotus Eriugena;²² subsequently, it was altered to meet the conditions of orthodoxy by Saint Thomas Aquinas. According to this position, creation is God's endless activity of grace represented as the progression of the Word as intrinsic goodness.²³ In more philosophical terms, creation is the

²¹ "Number, quantity is not primal [to God]: obviously before even duality, there must stand unity. The Dyad is secondary; deriving from unity, it finds in unity the determinate needed.... Thus by what we call the Number and the Dyad of that higher realm, we mean Reason... and the Intellectual Principle," (Plotinus 1992, 427). See "The Three Initial Hypostases," (423-34).

²² John Scotus Eriugena speaks of the three divisions of nature and the orders of created species that process from God's emanation. (See Eriugena 1976, 2-8.)

²³ See Aquinas: creation as "the mode of emanation of things from the first principle," *ST*, I, Q. 45, a. 1. Citations to the *Summa Theologica* will follow the standard abbreviations, *ST*, followed by part (I or II), question (Q) and article (a) numbers.

inner cognate of eternal reason that never has a beginning point but, nonetheless, exists as an immediate effect of divine agency. In the Neo-Platonic version the Godhead divides itself, or becomes other to itself, in order to generate continuously celestial spheres with their perfect cycles of motion. In the Gnostic version the division of the Godhead produces antithetical moments, that is, good and bad deities, or Æons.

For Hegel creation processes from unrestricted reason, or the Divine Word, that forever emanates from the eternal substance. The Word is a representation of the second moment of the Trinity as stated in the Gospel of John. Its procession, which externalizes itself from God as substance, is cosmic creation. Creation thus becomes a distinct mode of God that represents an expression of the second moment as progressing through its eternal activity from God to not-God. The universe is “God” only because of its immanent connection to the originating divine cause; it is not-God because the second moment of Absolute Being has fully externalized the natural realm from itself. The dialectical progression through externalization does not constitute pantheism but Neo-Platonism.

Hegel’s doctrine embraces modalism, but, since it is also embracing the fullness of Christian thought, it is capturing the cosmology of Eriugena’s version of Neo-Platonism, the progression of divine eternalities in Eckhart, and the cosmology of the Christian Gnostics.²⁴ With Platonism and Gnosticism we come to understand that there are divisions within God’s emanation among the ordered spheres in the universe whereby good is divided from evil. For example, in Eriugena’s cosmology the higher order of nature, the sphere of the angelic intellects,

²⁴ The Christian Gnostics include Basilides (fl. 120-40), Valentinus (c. 100- c.160), Marcion (c. 85-c.160), and Ptolemy (? - c. 180). In support of Hegel’s contention that this movement should be identified as Christian, see Alastair Logan who writes, “if asked what made them Christian, members of the early Church would probably have said accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour,” (Logan 2006, 61). (Also, see David Brakke 2010, 31-5. He argues that only with Manicheanism does Gnosticism become a separate religion: 24.)

having the Trinity at the center of their perpetual motion, represents all the goodness and perfection of the emanating Word that causes cosmic reality. Yet, as we descend into the lower orders of nature, towards the sublunary sphere and to the Earth itself, its goodness and perfection dampens. The cause of which lies not in any deficiency of the emanating Word but in its consequence: the resulting weakness of corporeal existence. The Word externalizes itself by degrees from most perfect to the least. At the lowest level, or the most fully externalized, the divine has become other to itself: a realm where natural evil occurs. Natural existence is a radically corrupt state and we, having natural existence, share in this evil. This is the evil that inheres in the terrestrial existence but not in humanity's divine universal self-consciousness.

Early Christian Gnosticism and Medieval Catholic Neo-Platonism supply the image, but Hegel is not committing the philosophical concept to the peculiarities of what is imagined by these congregations, which is a regression from the pure philosophical proposition into art. His point is that the image imitates the concept. Art, understood in terms of popular devotional attitudes and the history of the Early, Medieval, and Reformed Christian congregations, tended to supplant the logical concept with devotional metaphors. It regresses back towards "Religion as Art Work," and thereby misconceives the divine relationship.

The core philosophical proposition is simply that the being-for-self of God, the second mode as eternal reason, continuously generates the reality of the universe. The latter exists both *with* the Word, as an effect is with its cause, but *outside* it, as an effect is external to its cause. Nonetheless, it is still identified with the Godhead as the fourth term of it. The monarchical, or unified, nature of the Godhead is maintained as the essential truth of the proposition because these modes are not the same as eternal substance, but are representations of externalizations in the faithful's imagination.

The last act of creation is when the Word becomes flesh, or the being of God is externalizing itself into humanity, the *congregation* ascends into the divine procession. With human exaltation we reach beatific happiness. The act of creation whereby humanity is elevated into divinity occurs in the establishment of the religious identity in “universal self-consciousness”; this is the only level of self-identity capable of absolute knowing. But for now let us simply see what Hegel says about this moment:

The sublimated [divine] essence, that is, the immediate presence of its self-conscious being, is essence *qua* universal self-consciousness. This is Absolute Being, conceptualized as the sublimated singular self and, thus, expresses immediately the constitutive activity of a community [*Gemeinwesen*] which earlier resided in representative thought. Now it has returned to itself as the inner self. Spirit proceeds, henceforth, from beyond the two elements of its determinacy [imagined as father and son], from representative thought, into the *third* element that is self-consciousness as such (Hegel 1980, 415).

The third moment, Absolute Spirit as the universal self, occurs as the union between the Christian community and God. Absolute Spirit constitutes this self-identical unity. One would have to say that this core self is a special creation in the sense that it happens in time and space and occurs only through the immanent connection between human consciousness and the personality of God as the God-man, Jesus. Hegel elaborates on this point saying that

Spirit is, therefore, posited in the third element, that is, in *universal self-consciousness*; it is its own *community*. The movement of the community as self-consciousness, which distinguished itself by its representation, is what *has been created*; this has come to exist *internally*. The divine man who has died, or the human God, is *implicitly* universal self-consciousness. He has come to exist *for this self-consciousness* (Hegel 1980, 417, emphasis is in the original).

Humanity is perfected in the generation of universal self-consciousness. Absolute Being equals the unity between subjective and objective spirit that is revealed as Absolute Spirit. Human consciousness from this point has this divine unity. It also retains, however, its own separate existence as a worldly thing. Thus, it has the qualities of corruption within it because it is still a natural being. Its reflective universal self-identity, in contrast to its naturalness, is the knowledge of its exaltation, and this achievement generates the final stage of cognition: Absolute Spirit as absolute knowledge. For Absolute Spirit has the speculative image of the Trinity within it that, as Augustine stated, is seen within consciousness's own nature and existence. Creation is now complete.

Incarnation

We have already addressed how the God-man is identified by Hegel with the personality of God. The Incarnation in simple terms is the historical appearance of the second moment of divine being as the universal self that has come into the world. It has a mundane existence witnessed by the faithful community. It is the special creation that marks the conceptual unity between God and humanity. In this way a duality resides within it. The Christian doctrine that the Son has a dual nature, both God and human, is entirely correct on this point. Its truth stands in contrast to alternative beliefs, such as, the monophysitism of the Copts or the Arians that claimed the Son has only one nature; for the Copts he was entirely divine, for the Arians he was entirely human. However correct dualism is in terms of Christology it also remains problematic for the unified community.

Insofar as the Son is viewed as a naturalized divinity some congregations identified him with the Lord of the World. Insofar as the Son is viewed as the kenosis, or God humbled into a

specific human being, other congregations identify him with the lowly Servant. Both representations point to the realization of the second Trinitarian moment in human history. For Hegel, beginning with “Self-Certainty,” the Servant achieves inner freedom of thought, and the Lord, being bound to the world, does not. The Servant embodies reason’s movement through history on the side of humility and faith. Through him all of creation is consummated because he represents both struggles with self-estrangement under the “Way of the World” and true happiness in “Revealed Religion.” Throughout the historical movement it is *simple faith* that defines itself with its convictions in religious self-certainty; this pious attitude of mind was the very thing that the freethinkers, in the sections “Culture” and the “Enlightenment,” despised (Hegel 1980, 299-300). In the eyes of those who have rejected the Son as Servant—namely, the public authorities of the bishops and kings from the empire of Constantine the Great to the *ancien régime* of the Bourbons—they depict the Son as they would see themselves, namely, as a Lord who is acting as God’s regent. Among the divided Christian ecclesia the God-man is, then, viewed in the contrasting shapes of Servant and Lord.

How these two conflicting accounts arise and compete with each other, we have to return to how Hegel conceives the *becoming* of the Incarnation. The Incarnation deals with an issue concerning the speculative nature of the proposition that the “self is Absolute Being” as a worldly phenomenon. This formulation is referring back to the opening of chapter seven where the issue is expressed in a different way. Speaking of absolute existence, Hegel says,

In fact, [Absolute] Spirit has the *shape*, or form, of being since it is the *object* of consciousness, but because in religion this *self*-consciousness has its essential definition implicitly, the shape has been posited to be a transparent self-fulfillment; the actuality that it contains is enclosed and sublimated in it—precisely in the

manner that when we speak of *consummate actuality* it is the *thought* of universal actuality (Hegel 1980, 364).

Hegel's concluding phrase is ostensibly referring to Saint Anselm's ontological argument; for the definition of Absolute Being is simply that being of which no greater can be thought—namely, a being of thought that has “universal actuality.” Hegel always championed Anselm's conception against Kant's criticisms as early as *Faith and Knowledge* (1802).²⁵ He is doing so here as well. From the “Preface” to the *Phenomenology* he has already indicated that he approaches the essence of God not by how eternal substance is named, which may be empty of any true predication, but by the attributes assigned speculatively to Absolute Being that belong to the universal self (Hegel 1980, 20-1).

The speculative proposition is that Absolute Being has a form of existence intimately related to speculative understanding. Hegel's purpose is to explicate and elaborate on the truth of the proposition in terms of human experience. A few pages further in chapter seven, he comes back to the point of how the content of Absolute Being appears to us through the developments of early religions. Speaking now of the initial appearance of speculative thought in terms of its content, he tells us that

The content that develops this pure *being*, or the perception of it, is thus the display that lacks the essence of substance. It is a *rising* only; it does not *set* into itself, or become the subject that posits its own self-distinctions. These determinations are only attributes that do not wax to independence but remain names of the many-named One. The One is clothed with the multifaceted powers of existence together

²⁵ Hegel says, “This idea [of the absolute identity of thought and being] is the very same that the ontological proof and all true philosophy recognize as the first and foremost, and, equally, the only true and philosophical, idea,” (Hegel 1968, 345; see also, 338). This is my translation.

with the shapes of actuality which are attached with an ornament of selflessness

(Hegel 1980, 371, emphasis in the original).

Hegel is describing the first stage of Incarnation that appears in ancient religions:

Zoroastrian belief in the God of Light, Ahura Mazda; Egyptian belief in the Sun God, Ra; Hellenic worship of the divine Son as Light, Phoebus Apollo. The concept of the deity rests in its unity and supremacy above all natural entities and forces, and its attributes are powers associated with corporeal existence. But, in terms of this conception, there is an ambiguity created because divine being does not exist as the universal subject. Its attributes, which name merely the appearance of substance, fail to describe religion's object and essence. The conception of a naturalistic god leads to a misrepresentation of divine substance because it is defined by natural powers, even though the community understands implicitly that this substance lies beyond any cosmic appearance. When the faithful speak of God's power they are addressing through these attributes the many-named One, even as they are not describing its essence. The truth of the monarchical form is not attained. Because natural religion lacks knowledge of the speculative proposition the essence of Absolute Being remains ineffable and in the Beyond.

With natural religion and the representation of God as the Essential Light we are at the beginning of religion whose depictions lead to logical conflicts, and yet this is also the true starting point of the Incarnation. The Incarnation is a process of understanding God bodily which only occurs in historical stages that lead to Christianity. It is not an event involving the Virgin Birth of Jesus; it occurs through the development of world religions as they represent the divine imaginatively. What is recognized through these historical stages is that the Incarnation expressed a duality, indeed, an antithesis between the worldly representation of God, which is found in both church liturgy and political authority as the Lord, and the necessary truth of Saint

Anselm's teaching of Jesus's redemptive humility that focuses on the ethical character of the obedient Servant.²⁶

The worldly representations move from the Essential Light as the highest cause of all natural beings, which retains, however, the form of a natural object (god as sky, sun, or stars), to the recognition that God as Absolute Being is external to all natural entities, even as they are indicators of his power. All the signs of nature implicitly refer to a veiled presence, which the priests and oracles of natural religion believe they can discern in dreams, visions, and animal entrails. Formative nature is itself an incarnation of God, or the fourth divine moment, in terms of its externalization.

The subsequent stage of the Incarnation, which moves beyond natural signs and visions of oracles, is also representational but, subsequently, is expressed through the works of art, especially, through the portrayals of the gods in Hellenic poetry. The gods are depicted in epic verse and the odes of the priestly hymns, but for Hegel the primary way of portraying the gods corporeally is through tragedy, in which the gods are revered, and in comedy, where they are portrayed as no better than the crudest mortals. The first plays where the incarnate god appears as a contemptible character are Aristophanes's *Frogs* (405 BCE), in which Dionysius pursues base carnal pleasures and openly mocks the dead tragedians, and his *Plutus* (388 BCE), in which the god of wealth has decayed into a blind and surly man who cannot discern the deserving from the undeserving. In these comedies the descent of the god into a human shape represents the loss of reverence and faith, and in this naturalized form the gods die. Natural existence is always represented as a state of corruption leading to death.

²⁶ Saint Anselm contends in *Cur Deus Homo* that "God did not...compel Christ to die; but he suffered death of his own will, not yielding up his life as an act of obedience, but on account of his obedience in maintaining holiness; for he held out so firmly in this obedience that he met death on account of it..." (Anselm 1962, 207-8).

The Incarnation in “Religion as Art Work” is not simply about divine debasement and bathos, by which naturalistic faith dies, but also about the possibility of human elevation by becoming a divine being. In chapter six, “Spirit,” section B, “The Self-Estranged Spirit, Culture,” the aristocratic Second Estate in the *ancien régime* is willing to sacrifice its life in honor of Christendom. Its self-identity shows us the good in terms of a devotion to the commonwealth: “In the form of the simplicity of pure consciousness, what is the first immediate and alterable essence of all consciousness, being *self-identical*, is the *good*; it is the independent spiritual power of the in-itself” (Hegel 1980, 269-70, emphasis is the original). Its pathway to purity and salvation lies, however, in the political corporation and not in subjective spiritualization (*Beseelung*). Culturally, political spiritualization through law and government can only belong to Objective Religion which Hegel identifies with the ecclesiastical institutions that are allied with state powers (Hegel 1989c, 127-8). The worldly church, which is militant, triumphant, and expectant, is a political-spiritual entity, and it sees itself as an emanation of the divine in the world. It conceives itself as the representative of the Lord of the World and acts as its viceroy. This is the behavior of the First Estate of the *ancien régime*.

In “Religion” the works of art develop the potential for the human ascent to divinity through the honor bestowed by civic religion. Hegel refers to this investiture of spiritual rewards with the accomplishments of the warrior who is elevated by the community. Livy in the *History of Early Rome* (c. 9 BCE) describes Horatio Cocles, a soldier, who stood against the Tarquin army and prevented its entrance into Rome; for his deeds the citizenry raised his image on a column and set it alongside the gods to be adored above the forum (Livy 1960, 114-5). The mortal hero becomes immortalized in religious festivals and arts:

...for in this celebration which honors a man the one-sidedness of the statutes disappears, and there resides only a spirit of the nation that has a determinate character that is divine.

The handsome warrior has, indeed, the honor of his own particular people... This one is the ensouled living artwork, pairing strength with beauty, and he is adorned with ornaments, which honored the graven idol, as a prize for his strength...; instead of being imparted to a god of stone, honor is given to him as the highest bodily presentation of the people's essence (Hegel 1980, 387-8).

Similarly, the achievement of apotheosis is the literary transformation of a human into a god which becomes an essential feature of Roman imperial religion: "One such cult has the feast where a man gives himself his own glory, although in this case the cult does not yet have the significance of the absolute essence; for the *essence* is initially offered to him but not yet as spirit. As such, the *essential* human shape is not attained. This cult lays down, however, both the foundation of the revelation and each distinctive moment" (Hegel 1980, 387). Hegel seems to be alluding to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c. 8 CE) where the divine elevation occurs for Julius Caesar who becomes *lucifer*, a shining star: "Caesar is a god in his own city. Him, illustrious in war and peace, not so much his wars triumphantly achieved, his civic deeds accomplished, and his glory quickly won, changed to a new heavenly body, a flaming star..." (Ovid 1916, 307).²⁷ Glory of action, adored by a populace, turns this Lord of the World into a god. Because of the Roman religion has focused on how humans can become divine, the foundation is set for the Christian revelation of a man who is accepted as God. The histories and poetry of Rome become the "smooth shape" of speech by which the church will also convey their understanding of the life of Jesus in the Gospels and the liturgy.

The Incarnation thus comes into the world through these previous moments of world religions; the two most significant being the death of the nature gods in Greek religion and the

²⁷ Ovid names the divine Caesar "lucifer" at verse 789.

apotheosis of human heroes in the Roman civic religion. The incarnate Son is simply the final manifestation of a world-historical theogony. But his history occurs in direct contrast to the pagan representations because, as we have already seen, Jesus alone has the being-for-self of the essential being. The true representation of the Son is one who appears as the Servant shaped by Unhappy Consciousness, and, as such, he suffers under the world and maintains simple faith. Only those who adhere to objective religion see him as yet another manifestation of the lord of light. In contrast, subjective religion with its piety recognizes that only by his rectitude and suffering does he achieve the supreme good. This kind of faith possesses the unity of will and reason that in chapter six, in the sections of “Morality” and “Conscience,” judging self-consciousness could not achieve for itself.

The true Son embodies divine reason and its emanation that results in creation. Jesus, as consummate reason, represents the pure duties of pious faith, and he stands in contrast to the “law of the daylight” of autocratic governments (see Hegel 1980, 252). Jesus as the God-man is both anticipated by and opposed to the apotheosis of a Caesar or a warrior. Only the true God-man forms the self-identity of the faithful’s universal self-consciousness. In contrast to his goodness these naturalistic representations of apotheoses should be viewed as representing misbegotten glory, or worldly evil. The naturalistic-civic deity, a *lucifer*, only returns to the political-spiritual corporation in order to usurp the true Son as the divine self.

The religious concept reaches its apex in Christianity’s subjective experience, but it cannot maintain its truth under the Way of the World which has led to an objectified religion. The Christian community first destroyed its common life in a series of conflicts concerning the identity of the Son. The Christian union divided into many antithetical sects: Catholics, Gnostics, Arians, Copts, and many more (On the history early schisms and the disunion of Christianity, see

Smith 1912, 137-41). The historical divisions are nothing else than a conceptual result of the two opposing representations of the Incarnation: one that represents the Son as the Master of the world, and the other that represents him as the free but obedient Servant who suffers under the world-order. These conflicts both divide and factionalize the early Church community, and, if we continued the history, they would also reappear in the conflict between so-called objective religion, which Hegel identifies with the public authority of Renaissance Catholicism (Hegel 1989d, 127-8), and subjective religion, which he identifies with the early Protestant Reformation (Hegel 1989b, 131).²⁸

Christianity can neither reunite itself without annulling all confessional identities nor purify itself from worldliness. Hegel contends that only by annulling the naturalistic character of the mediator, that is, by destroying his identity with the Lord of natural and civic religion, will the concept of the divine become free from the mundane and, thus, be understood purely as the speculative procession of reason's emanations. In the death of naturalness *our* self-consciousness is also purified. Our purification belongs to our subjective union with Absolute Spirit. It will become the object of pure knowledge that is only possible, as Hegel tells us, because of the death of particularity in the divine being. Only by sharing in its death of naturalness can we ascend to the pure knowledge of Absolute Spirit (the subject of chapter eight). Hegel explains that "This is not an actual *dying*, not in the way that the *particular* being *is represented* to have died *actually*, but particularity dies in the universal; this means that in its knowledge essential being is reconciled with itself" (Hegel 1980, 418-9, emphasis is in the original). In this way the Word as

²⁸ According to H. S. Harris Protestantism perfects spiritual interiority in public life: "This moment of perfect equilibrium is the religion of the successful Protestant reformers....Every one...must do this duty in this life, in the station of God has given him; but each...must define it for himself, in the inwardness of his own conscience, where he is alone with God, spirit face to face with spirit," (Harris 1983, 515-6).

unrestricted reason belongs both to philosophy and to the truth of the speculative proposition that the “self is Absolute Being.”

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